

New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Commuter Rail Study
First Steering Committee Meeting
October 16, 2002 – 3:00 P.M.
Greater Hartford Transit, Union Station, Hartford, CT

The first steering committee meeting began with an introduction by Rich Hollis of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT). He thanked everyone for coming and gave a brief synopsis of the rail corridor study. He stressed that this is more than a feasibility study and should be looked at as an implementation study. He then asked everyone in the room to introduce themselves.

Tim Sorenson of Wilbur Smith Associates (WSA) then began a presentation outlining the rail corridor study in more detail. The presentation will be available at the project website www.nhhsrail.com. Mr. Sorenson discussed the project background and project scope, emphasizing the importance of public involvement in this study.

Justin Fox (WSA) continued the presentation with a discussion of the study area and existing rail facilities. He also discussed the potential alternatives from minimum build to maximum build and the project evaluation criteria that will be used to evaluate the alternatives.

After the presentation, the floor was opened for questions and comments:

The first question asked was if a connection to Bradley International Airport been looked at. Mr. Sorenson answered that there is an existing freight rail spur to be looked at during the course of the study and other types of modal airport connections are to be considered.

Mr. Sorenson also asked the committee for their input on additional locations for stations (other than existing locations). Among the locations suggested were the former station locations in North Haven, Newington Junction, and Enfield. Another New Haven station at the Route 80 crossing of the rail (near I-91 and Route 80) was suggested as well.

Mr. Hollis stated that a maximum build alternative would look at a commuter rail station in every town and at major I-91 crossings of the rail line.

A question was asked regarding whether additional rail track would be added. Mr. Sorenson replied that dual tracking of the entire corridor where there is currently only single track would be looked at in the maximum build alternative.

Another question asked whether the study team would be looking at environmental impacts before April 2003. Mr. Sorenson stated that environmental assessment will be included in the evaluation of alternatives. This will be followed by the required environmental impact, which is not part of this effort. Mr. Drew Galloway of AMTRAK added that most of corridor was multi-track at one time. Since the right of way still exists, usually improvements would get a categorical exclusion.

One committee member asked whether town and regional plans would be examined. Mr. Sorenson replied that this would be the case, and that the study team would be meeting with the towns to discuss plans. He stressed that consultation with the towns is a key part of the public involvement process.

Another question alluded to what kind of modeling will be used to come up with ridership and demand. The ConnDOT travel model will be used, with the assumption that the New Britain-Hartford Busway is operational. The model does not include regional travel, but the study team will look at Amtrak's origin & destination and travel surveys. Rail and airport connections in other states will also be looked at for examples, as a basis of ridership on a Bradley Airport connection.

In reference to a question of whether electrification is being locked into, Mr. Fox stated that this would not be the case, and at this time it is anticipated that diesel locomotives will be used on the service.

A committee member asked what the model outcome would be if there were no increased highway capacity. Mr. Hollis stated that no new capacity is planned for I-91 or Route 15, and this would be assumed in the model.

Another question was asked regarding who would operate the system. Mr. Hollis said that a number of rail road operators have expressed an interest and this will be reviewed as part of the implementation plan. The rail line is owned by Amtrak. The next question asked about ADA issues, especially if there is a low platform at the train stations. Mr. Fox replied that current technology will be assumed and will meet ADA standards. This current technology includes lifts and ramps.

A committee member asked what other strategies are being examined in the region. Mr. Sorenson alluded to the RTS recommendations which include four bus rapid transit lines, a downtown Hartford circulator, and the commuter rail study.

Judy Gott of South Central Council of Governments inquired if, given the present New Haven parking shortage, could one-ride train services from Hartford to the Shoreline be provided. Mr. Sorenson replied that such a service could be looked into, similar to the Shore Line East service to Stamford.

Another question was asked regarding whether there would be any service gaps. Locations brought up included North Haven, Windsor Locks, and the area south of Springfield, including the new Basketball Hall of Fame. Although they will be looked at in the maximum build condition, more stations will lead to more travel time and may reduce demand. Therefore, the evaluation will include station spacing criteria as well as ridership and access issues.

When asked about ticket prices, Mr. Hollis said that the costs would be similar to those per mile on the Shoreline East service.

In reference to ridership, a member asked if the line will be evaluated based on total ridership or new riders. Mr. Sorenson replied that it looks at the increase in riders and travel times. The model also looks at transit user benefits.

Another committee member asked about the operating subsidies in Shoreline East. Peter Richter of ConnDOT replied that the current subsidy is approximately \$18 per passenger trip, and the farebox recovery ratio is 12%. This value is a little higher than the national average due to the non-urban nature of the service and maintenance and capital costs included in the subsidy.

The next question raised the issue of how parking needs would be evaluated. Mr. Sorenson replied that the model would address parking by evaluating the number of spaces needed at each station. However, rail service may be started in the meantime, with a few stations being short on parking.

Another issue raised was whether financial contributions from Massachusetts would be required. The reply was that once that stage of the study was reached, financial contributions would in fact be discussed.

One final issue concerned the guarantee of Amtrak service. Mr. Sorenson, Mr. Hollis and Mr. Galloway all agreed that this service is not guaranteed, even though ridership on this line is relatively high. However, if Amtrak didn't operate, the commuter rail would pick up and operate any service gaps. However, given the profitable nature of intercity rail service in the corridor, it is anticipated that the service would continue.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:45 pm with some questions and comments addressed on an individual basis.

Attendance at the meeting included the following committee members and alternates, study team members and other interested parties:

Noah Berger	Federal Transit Administration Region 1
Barbara Breslin	Federal Highway Administration
Joseph Duffy	Connecticut Southern R.R
David Fitzgerald	P&W
Drew Galloway	National Railroad Passenger Corporation
Michael Sharff	Peter Pan Bus Lines
Hon. Stephen Cassano	Town of Manchester (TSB Member)
Dennis Pope	I-91 TIA
Susan Lee	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Frederick Riese	Department of Environmental Protection
Hon. Marc S Ryan	Office of Policy and Management
Philip L. Smith	Department of Economic and Community Development
Tim Doherty	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Judy E. Gott	South Central Regional Council of Governments
Ken Shooshan-Stoller	Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency
Tom Maziarz	Capitol Region Council of Governments
Richard J. Porth	Capitol Region Council of Governments
Karyn M. Gilvarg	City of New Haven
Bhupen Patel	City of Hartford
Jeff Shea	City of Hartford
James Mahoney	Town of Berlin
Peter Souza	Town of Windsor
Laura McMenamin	Town of Enfield
Scott Shanley	Town of Enfield
Charles S. Barone	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Bruce H. Garrett	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Richard Hollis	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Peter Richter	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Carmine Trotta	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Justin Fox	Wilbur Smith Associates
Tim Sorenson	Wilbur Smith Associates
Kari Watkins	Wilbur Smith Associates
Karl Smith	Wilbur Smith Associates
Cynthia R. Lemek	All Aboard
Dan Lorimer	CT Fund for the Environment
Jean Stimolo	Rideworks
Representative James Abrams	
Representative Chris Donovan	
Representative Ken Green	
Senator Toni Harp	
Bradshaw Smith	